

# THE MEASURE

## A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by Kenneth Slade Alling, Marcia Nardi, May  
Folwell Hoisington, Therese Lindsey, Margaret  
Harvey, Frank Mitvalsky — — — — —

A Reply to Mr. Wolf From Ernest Walsh — — — —

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# The Measure

*A Journal of Poetry*

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## This Flesh

INOCULATE with Immortality  
This Flesh: Nay drug it with oblivion.  
It is too fabulously frail to be  
The vessel to hold heat like any sun:  
And all its wanton flame is spilled too soon  
To number it among the minor stars:  
Nor has it beauty dead unlike the moon.  
It is no better than a log that chars  
Blackened and brittle into cold decay.  
And yet beloved it has housed your heart  
And mine: become our shelter for a day:  
Our habitation: Something set apart;  
Hollow but hallowed with a gleam of spirit:  
Our Heaven or fantastically near it.

*Kenneth Slade Alling*

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## Sonnet

**I**N beauty have I read my destined doom,  
As other men read theirs in some disease  
Whose presence in the body no-one sees  
Beyond the doctor's consultation room.  
And just as they, because to outward view  
Like all the rest, forget their sudden fear  
And laugh again, and dance away the year  
Discretion might have lengthened into two;  
So I, through manifest identity  
Of pulseless bone in yielding spine and knee,  
Bow me to earth—knowing how any hour  
Some petal from a fruit still in the flower  
Will fall and leave me slain without a scar.  
Safer were drift-wood underneath a star.

## Sonnet

**B**E cruel if you will . . . I seek no more  
The warmth that foam-eluding cliffs retain:  
Whom loneliness has moulded, grain by grain,  
Go down to sand upon a barren shore;  
Whom long denial grinded to the core,  
Because it could not lift or cleave or stain,  
For different reasons now love sea and rain  
That only proved them whole and strong before.

Suns that draw beauty from the solid earth  
Would scatter me . . . Ah, what were kindness worth?  
Snub me, my dear, Indignant tears will do,  
If hope yet grants them, or the quick, sure tide  
Of indiscriminate passion, to imbue  
With old compactness my gray, shifting pride.

## Skeptic

THE lowest level of unconsciousness,  
Whereon all other men proceed to goals  
Though what they are their own eyes never guess  
(Say nothing of their hopes and dreams and souls)  
Is higher than the plane my thoughts have struck  
In burrowing below the cross-roads. Fear  
Of faultless vision vainly sought from luck  
A new Rosetta Stone for sign-posts here.

I might have understood the talk of trees,  
Intelligently spoken with the dead.  
Roots ended farther up, and under these  
Skulls also. Long ago our elders said,  
To scourge us children digging in the ground,  
You might emerge where Chinamen abound.

*Marcia Nardi*

## Dream

AND then I thought I saw a vision born  
Of tranquil resonance: the voice I chose  
To be my melody, like blowing corn  
Beneath oncoming rain; and I arose  
From silence, where a Heaven bade me close  
My eyes to greet a Heaven, and the worn  
Grey music of the twilight sang its woes  
To me, young lover, that my heart be torn  
With welcome wonders. I would then have leapt,  
My being vibrant with a light desire,  
To that unreal gay garden where she slept  
Who guarded but for me her chastened fire,  
Rejoicing. And the dream records I crept  
One cloven moment, and could go no higher.

*Paul Sandoz*

## So For The Little While

SO for the little while that you remain,  
In spite of sure decay, an unscarred curve  
Of terrible granite, or the naked nerve  
Of steel that severs cleanly, without pain—  
Leaving the startled victim without moan  
Until the swordsman vanishes from sight  
And the wound wakes to torture in the night—  
So for this little while I am your own.

But when I am made conscious of green mould  
Upon the granite, or a sheath of rust  
Upon the steel, I shall arise and fling  
Myself against the pressure of your dust,  
Seeking the beauty that is never old,  
Which I shall find, if I find anything.

*Lindley Williams Hubbell*

## Obsession

NIGHT-LONG, through the grasping, pressing, smothering  
dark,  
My spirit leaped and strained to evade its touch;  
When daylight came, exhausted, spent, the touch  
Of agony yet at my heart, I heard the lark  
In the meadow sing at the sun. A vital spark  
Rekindled the flame of my soul to find that such  
A freshness soothed frayed nerves that had borne too much  
Of a gathering pain and a terror, pitiless, stark.

Yet still at my heels the horror stalked all day;  
I moved machine-like; whirled in my squirrel-wheel  
In vain endeavor to lose the presence; to feel  
In motion of all familiar duties a stay  
Of the ultimate moment of anguish, hopeless, at bay;  
Or with fangs of the skeleton foe set fast in my heel.



## Stigmata

**I**N the dead of the night I showed you the blood on my brow,  
And the wounds on my hands and feet:—you were sorry, very.  
You had never intended to hurt me; but, anyhow  
Were not stigmata chiefly imaginary?

So, after that, my blood seeped away unseen;  
No wounds appeared on my hands, my feet, my forehead;  
Slow bleeding internally, turning to hidden gangrene—  
And you so satisfied that I didn't act horrid!

*May Folwell Hoisington*

## Compass

**W**EST of the Pinus Altos hills,  
The Burro Mountains lie,  
West of the Burro Mountains,  
The desert, and the sky.

South of the Pinus Altos hills,  
The Santa Rita mines,  
The smoke curls of the mill town,  
Weaving cloud designs.

North of the Pinus Altos hills,  
Fields with poppies gay,  
Where tiny cedars scent the breeze,  
And yuccas sway.

East of the Pinus Altos hills,  
The new days glow,  
And what is east of the sunrise,  
Only the high hawks know.

*Lucy Hale Sturges*

## Rain

THE rain is a little handmaiden,  
Eleven, and ready to be given in marriage.

How soft her silver sandals on the roof,  
Her little ivory nails along the window.

How round the little circles of her lips  
Stopping in the evening, drinking at the fountain. . .

Across the court the little fingered vision of the rain  
Comes, bearing sandalwood.

*Helen Howe*

## How We Went to Church

MY father was a learnèd man,  
Stern and tender. Nobody can  
Compare with him in my acquaintance yet.  
I never shall forget  
How he took us children to church.  
We lived out a couple of miles. On the Lord's day  
We drove to town (whose streets were hard red clay)  
In a big wagon . . . I have never heard since  
A noise so loud as that wagon made  
In those quiet streets!  
The recollection even makes me wince.  
Why was I so ashamed? Why didn't father care?  
It seemed to me he purposely  
Made the horses go fast because I couldn't bear  
For folks to know we didn't come  
In a buggy, too!  
When I grew older I begged until  
He let me out below the hill  
(The black horse knew and always gave a lurch)  
And drove on as mad as he could be,  
While I walked becomingly  
To church!



# Plains-City From A Tower

(ON A MARCH MORNING)

**I**N the distance a group of oil-derricks needle the sky  
With the soldierly precision of candles on a cake.  
The live-oaks nestle, pillows of pale new green,  
Impossibly lovely between the sharp slate roofs.  
Level, clean and distant the sky-line is marked  
Delicate with green and grey, and here and there  
A caught light gleams upon a window-glass.  
In bounding saffron billows trails the smoke,  
A glorious libation poured into the pouch  
Of the wind, or doled from some tall chimney, scant  
And grey, it melts suddenly in the air like snow  
Falling in water. The houses, lately washed  
With rain, gleam wet and new on their East sides  
With that distinctness as though each for joy  
Had turned round in the night to greet the sun!

*Therese Lindsey*

## Of Myself

**I**F I should ever die  
Would anybody say  
That it was really I  
Turned beneath the clay?

I, who was so proud,  
Arrogant at best,  
I, who hate a crowd,  
Buried with the rest?

I who was so free,  
Wandering and brave,  
How could I be  
Narrowed in the grave?

## Not At Home

I'VE closed my eyes to you, spring,  
I'll not watch you swing  
Into the valley, as before.  
I'll slam my door quickly in your face.  
Yes, the winds do race in the trees,  
But my ears are shut.  
No I'll not go on my knees  
To see the slow yellow shoots push up the loam—  
This is my home,  
Leave me alone,  
No spring comes here this year.  
Can't you see I won't have you listening,  
Whispering to me  
At my door?  
Go away!  
I don't care if the day  
Is pale and shining like moth—  
It might be night for all of me,  
Though I cared last year.  
Too much, maybe.  
There's no fear that I will again:  
I'm done with men;  
What good's a shower to a wilted flower like me?  
I give you warning,  
You can't stay.  
Mine is a house of mourning.  
Go away!

## To One Who is Restless

WHERE are you going,  
And when will you come back?  
I don't ask a reason  
Only—you will come back?

I know it's not the season  
(Last time you went in May  
And every day  
It rained that year  
Till you came back here).

I can't keep track of everything  
As well as I should:  
Of when the birds begin to sing  
In the damp green wood,

Of when the lilacs bud,  
And the woodpeckers thud  
At a hollow tree;  
But if you'll tell  
I can remember well when you'll return to me.

Where are you going?  
It's pretty enough right here  
In the fields, with cattle lowing  
And milking time near.  
The grass won't smell so sweet  
Anywhere you go,  
And I can show you where the crocus grow.

*Margaret Harvey*



## Enemies

SOMEHOW I got along with him  
By keeping still;  
His acts would have me crippling him  
Had I the will.

He scorned me—proud, delicate thing:  
I could have brought him low.  
They laughed at me for bearing him  
And still I let it go.

One day he came all sick and weak  
And I forgot the wrong.  
After his petty ill had passed  
Somehow we got along.

But I had seen the possible,  
The death look in his eye—  
I tell folks now that we are friends  
And wonder why.

## Dandelions

COOL yellow sun upon sun:  
Dandelions have begun.  
Soon  
Silken globe-like  
Moon after moon.

Whisperings of ages grow and die  
Within this small phenomenal sky.

## Sagebrush Desert

**S**AGEBRUSH catching at my shoes and sleeves,  
Why would you hold me back?  
Your desert here is only emptiness,  
Waste, starvation, lack.

You whimper something about dreams  
In your vast atmosphere;  
Something about agonizing sunsets  
That are more candid here.

I kick away your thorns; you snarl  
And grow hot and gray.  
At last I have sprained my foot  
And can but stay.

## The House

**H**E stalked in, whistling a tune  
And hung his hat on the moon.  
"Oh, dear," she said, "You've made it dark."  
He bent and struck a comet-spark.

He tore the wall paper from the sky,  
Laughing . . . Slowly she began to cry.  
"Worthless and cruel as men are—"  
And she pinned her scarf with a star.

## Lovers

**Y**OU and I, titans did walk  
On narrow earth;  
You and I in grave deific talk  
And vital mirth.

Now in silence a pigmy pair  
Under this tree;  
Earth has grown too vast to care  
For you and me.

## Helen

**I**THINK that Helen of Troy  
Was just a girl like you  
And ran off with a soldier boy  
For all a king might do.

Armies of men were less to her  
Than ants about her toes:  
She found her love and could endure  
Half a world for foes.

## Silence

**S**ILENCE is the perfect speech,  
Silence that earth can understand,  
Silence with infinite reach,  
The last word at its command.  
Silence is the happiest cry,  
The saddest song;  
Silence spoke as you went by  
Three doubts long.

*Frank Mitvalsky*



# The Measure & A Journal of Poetry

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## A Reply To Mr. Wolf

NOTHING would be easier than to take each of the statements Mr. Robert L. Wolf makes in his article "Forgive Us Our Debts" (in the June *Measure*) and reveal the false reasoning and general weakness of his position. It would be easy—but I shirk the hum-drum effort of a task so largely a matter of quoting and meeting quotations with refutations backed up by concrete fact. I shirk the effort of replying to six long pages of nonsense.

I confine myself to my greatest objection: Mr. Wolf's sophomoric, off-hand fashion of dismissing poets of first-rate order in Mr. Wolf's fourth-rate manner.

Mr. Wolf's article is a statement of Mr. Wolf's opinions. And the phrase "our cherished Miss Millay" suggests a small, family group-opinion which Mr. Wolf mistakes for the world.

Mr. Wolf evidently regards Miss Millay as a miracle and the rest of the American poets as a lot of bad boys and girls some of whom are repenting and coming humble and running back to the true fold.

Without wishing to detract from Miss Millay's excellence which the writer has occasion to remember with pleasure approaching enthusiasm, I protest against the positive quality of Mr. Wolf's state-

ments. He suggests that somehow an election has been held in which he, Mr. Wolf, has been elected spokesman of contemporary thought in its reactions to the poetry of today.

Mr. Wolf must realize that the fate of poets is not determined by reviewers, editors, publishers and fellow-poets. A poet may be for the time being shelved and sidetracked from the main-line of attention, but there is a certain mixed public drawn from all classes and races that, if brought together from the ends of the earth, would provide some startling contrasts, which in other ages, and in this age, makes up the jury, in fact, the electric wire by which the energy of poetry is kept alive, and passed on to a similar group in the next. The character of this public seldom changes from one generation to another. It is an independent-minded body of rare spirits one cannot label because they are of all classes yet always manage to escape the label of their class.

I would suggest that this group is not concentrated in Greenwich Village or any part of Greater New York or America or Europe. One has got to travel to get away from local prejudices of local groups, to get a good earful of what intelligent standard-creating opinion is about.

I write from Europe and my sources of observation are not the cafes of Montparnasse or the tea-rooms of the Place Concorde where opinion and taste is a question of fashion, but the intelligent constant lovers of good poetry everywhere, as I meet them,—preferably not in “artistic surroundings”. The man in Europe is interested in the American poet who interprets the development of his country, therefore an age, or the poet who is distinctively a creative and imaginative poet. Miss Millay, although she may have that magic which is, of course, required of any poem, certainly cannot be placed at the top of a list that comes under the description of interpretive and distinctively imaginative and creative work.

A list say, including Sandburg and Frost.

Miss Millay is a great favorite with young girls, poetry societies of married ladies, and that type of American citizen who boasts of never having been west of Syracuse. The citizen who wins the contempt of Englishmen by telling them he wishes he had been born in England.

But—take it for what it is worth, the best known American

poets in Europe are Carl Sandburg and Ezra Pound. England I do not mention because it is a country not noted for its reception of new ideas and new forces in art and literature.

In America, which I visited two months ago and travelled from coast to coast, I found a similar condition. For every American citizen abroad anxious to claim relationship and resemblance to England there is a counterpart at home. Just as there is always a counterpart to that intelligent group in Europe which I have mentioned. This last, I must say usually avoids clubs of a literary nature. One finds its members usually by discovering the best book shop in town. It buys and reads and cherishes books, this group, and some of the money is earned in a garage, some in factories. It is a *He-World* that reads a book anywhere a man can smoke while he reads and express his reactions as he pleases. It is not often to be found in a Free Public Library, tip-toeing around asking for books in a dry whisper, reading books with pages some lines of which are blotted out by the proprietary rubber stamp mark of the community's name. My group is not to be found sitting in a library chair no one but a Methodist could be at home in.

One point stands out in reference to Mr. Wolf's observations that the poets are returning to the true fold of formal English verse. I ask him to witness that this group leading the return rarely signed a first rate free verse poem. It is mostly the return of the unsuccessful, the weary and plaintive. The free verse of a poet formerly formal is usually pretty pale stuff showing no music or conception of the requirements of free verse. But the writer of free verse, on the contrary, can win the posies every time when he writes a sonnet or lyric. He has command of his medium.

Mr. Wolf's remark that Sandburg stems from Whitman is based on too superficial a reading of either of these poets to call for an answer. Such observations are worthy of a professor of literature not a reader of literature.

Sandburg stems from Lincoln in so far as Lincoln understood with the ripeness of great humanity the humanity of his day. I suggest to Mr. Wolf that a poet is great in so far as he has great humanity. Magic, art, etc., are symptoms of its presence.

But the lyric and sonnet as high priests and high marks of poetic



form have passed with horse-cars and the-polite-interest-in-God-art-and-politics gentry. This is the age of the skyscraper and radio. The aeroplane and phonograph. The man who stands shaking his fist at the mountain of what is essentially American and the artists who are its spirit will be dead a long time before he hears his gesture answered by a slowly drawled: "I will not die."

In conclusion, I cannot resist quoting Mr. Wolf when he says: "Alfred Kreymborg, seeing at least two years ago which way the wind blew, had begun to write sonnets." So—because the wind blows in telling us coats are to have two buttons this year in place of three it is the mark of the great poet to follow the wind. This the ear-mark of great literary indications! Get on the band-wagon.

But when Mr. Wolf says: "The reason the 1912-21 poets failed" one's patience is exhausted. Failed! Failed with whom and in what manner? But then, to fail in an age that approves such criticisms is perhaps not failure.

ERNEST WALSH,  
Serrabassa-Abetone,  
Provincia di Modena,  
Italy.

## CONTRIBUTORS

With the exception of MR. ALLING, MR. SANDOZ, MR. HUBBELL, and MISS STURGES, this number is dedicated to new names—which, we dare believe, is as it should be.

MARCIA NARDI is the *nom de guerre* of a young poetess at present in this city.

MAY FOLWELL HOISINGTON, who writes from Maine, is, among other things, mother, poet, and student of Afghani and Persian.

Of HELEN HOWE, we know only that she lives in Mexico and that her little poem made a certain humid day memorable.

THERESE LINDSEY is prominently identified with poetic activities in Texas.

MARGARET HARVEY informs us that her home is in Minneapolis, that she is twenty-one, a graduate of Smith, a member, while there, of Grace Hazard Conkling's class in versification.

FRANK MITVALSKY, in a delightful document, says that he is a native Arizonian of Czech descent, twenty-one, and confident of survival. His lyrics caused quite a stir in this office. We think they have something of the elfin sagacity, the whimsically awkward precision of Emily Dickinson: the crisp idiom, the droll accent, the gnomic naivete and irony.

We reluctantly announce the resignation from the editorial board of the *Measure* of KENNETH SLADE ALLING.

# The Measure

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